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Connecticut Society of the Sons of the American Revolution



Address by
HON. GEORGE B. CHANDLER
AT
Annual Banquet
OF THE CONNECTICUT SOCIETY
AT
Hartford, Connecticut, February 22, 1917

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The Society
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WHAT WOULD WASHINGTON HAVE US DO?

At no time in the life of the nation has it been more imperative that the Sons of the American Revolution gather on the birthday of the Father of His Country to ask themselves solemnly what he would have them do if he were now living. To be invited to address you at this grave moment is an honor and responsibility that I do not underrate.

My problem upon this occasion is as much to know what to leave unsaid as to know what to say. America is a Republic and its stability rests upon the principle of majority rule. The people have spoken at a recent national election and no candid man can deny that the policy of our government up to the date of that utterance has been approved. It is my belief that a referendum to the people would yield a like endorsement of the course of the administration up to the present moment. To what extent, under such circumstances and in such an hour, is private disagreement with what appears to be the policy of the government and the will of the people consistent with loyalty and good citizenship? That there is a limit beyond which such opposition can not with safety or decency go at such a juncture, no person schooled in the principles of free government can deny; and, while giving voice to some of the emotions that now possess me — and which I believe possess this ancient and patriotic Society — I shall endeavor not to transgress that limit.

I assume that I may recite historical facts, ancient or recent, without offense. He is a superficial and biased student of events who will not admit that no great nation, with the possible exception of China, in modern history — or so far as I know, in ancient history — ever has submitted peacefully to a series of outrages and affronts such as have been perpetrated against the United States of America during the past two years. The question which we should ask today of the spirit of George Washington is — Has such peaceful acquiescence been justifiable? Has the national character been enriched or impoverished by this policy? And to what extent can we continue to submit to diplomatic insult and murder upon the high seas without taking up arms?

During this unfortunate period there have been two classes of offenses to be weighed — first, those against the recognized laws of nations and the unwritten rules of hospitality. These I call offenses against the common morality. And, second, those

against the laws of God, recognized in greater or less degree among all civilized peoples. These, I will term offenses against the higher morality.

First, as to the former class. This war started with a violation of the express terms of a convention to which both Germany and the United States were signatory parties. The invasion of Belgium contravened in the most audacious manner the terms of Articles 1, 2 and 5 of the Second Hague Conference, and it was our right under that instrument — and, as I believe, our duty, — to protest against that wanton and illegal act.

Thereupon there was immediately inaugurated within our borders, under the leadership and probably with the financial backing of eminent citizens of a foreign power who were enjoying the hospitality of this country, a propaganda for the influencing of public sentiment, which continued with increasing virulence in proportion as it declined in effectiveness, until it finally came to be aimed at our government itself and its responsible head. This propaganda sought not only to control nominations for high office but to determine elections after nominations had been made. Along with this were conducted fomentings of domestic discord, the instigation of strikes in munition plants, the dynamiting of factories, the destruction of bridges, and conspiracies against transportation and production. German consuls and attachés have been convicted of complicity in these outrages in American courts. An Austrian ambassador has been dismissed for diplomatic discourtesy, correspondence has been uncovered insulting the President of the United States, more of a graver nature probably uncovered and wisely suppressed, and a German Ambassador permitted and apparently forgiven the exquisite insolence of publishing in the American press an advertisement warning the people of a free and sovereign state that on a certain specific occasion his Government contemplated an act of wholesale homicide of its citizens on the high seas — a program that was carried out to the letter when the *Lusitania* received her fatal stab and her human cargo found its grave in the Irish sea.

In the meantime there has continued the wearying monotony of sinkings of American ships and murders of American citizens against which we have solemnly protested with the warning that no "word or act" would be omitted in the maintenance of our legal rights. At the same time there have been probable violations of property rights by the Entente Allies — irritating but involving no loss of life and clearly of a justifiable character. When these outrages culminated in the Sussex note, an agreement was solemnly entered into with Germany which, as we infer from convincing evidence, the government of that nation probably had no intention of keeping beyond the time when her submarine fleet could be made ready for the final onslaught. This pact

has been summarily abrogated and a career of anarchy upon the high seas entered upon, on a scale hitherto unheard of and of a character such as the world has not witnessed since this republic in its gallant youth raised its arm against the Barbary pirates. After due deliberation diplomatic relations with Germany were severed and the enterprising advertiser of homicide in the first degree was finally given his passports.

In the meantime there has been kept up by the Prussian autocracy, with a fatuous insolence hard to explain, a series of annoyances to our ambassador, our consuls and our citizens in Germany, the legal status of which I will not presume to discuss. The situation today is that for the first time in American history — except possibly under the Embargo of unblest memory — outgoing freight is piled high upon our docks and any ship bearing the flag of our country that ventures upon the immemorial highway of the nations does so at its own risk. A more intolerable or humiliating situation it would be hard to conceive.

Such has been the course of those events whose sanctions and penalties fall within the scope of international law and common practice. Coming now to the offenses against the higher morality — and it is upon the higher morality alone that our supineness can be explained or justified — what have we beheld? A people, distinguished in scholarship, industry, music and the higher arts, have been trained mentally and physically for four decades in the philosophy of military aggression, forged into a weapon infinitely the most powerful ever devised by the wit of man, and finally hurled at the appointed moment against the peace of the world and the rights of its neighbors. That this people has not been without its grievances in the past, and that the nations opposed to them have not been at all times guiltless of offense, no candid man can deny; but no historical fact can be more clearly established than that this colossal adventure has been long premeditated by the Prussian oligarchy and that the entire Germanic mind has been assiduously prepared for it. The literature of the country has been suffused with evidences of this purpose, and the astounding feature of the situation, as we look back, has been the credulity and indifference of neighboring peoples in the presence of patent facts. Probably they, too, had their pacifists who averred that it never would happen.

When the opportune occasion arose, we beheld Serbia, bullied and brow-beaten by a series of conditions purposely made so intolerable that no nation could accept them and preserve its autonomy and self-respect, and subsequently ground remorselessly under the heel of the invader, its people reduced to starvation and its aged monarch made a pitiable petitioner at the courts of Europe.

In the Belgian invasion we have beheld, in addition to the violation of the terms of the Hague Convention, a violation of the treaty of 1831 and of the immemorial and unwritten law of nations. Not only has an organized state been ruthlessly overrun, but in the process fair cities have been leveled and venerable temples of learning and art demolished. We have beheld the invaded territory extortionately taxed for the privilege of being invaded, and as a crowning infamy the deportation of its citizens by tens of thousands into state slavery in an adjoining nation.

We have beheld France, our earliest friend, who succored this nation in its helpless infancy, treacherously stabbed in the back because, credulously trusting in the plighted word of her great enemy, she had restricted her fortifications and mobilization to her own eastern frontier.

We have beheld Greece, bound by all the historical ties of gratitude to France and England, and pledged by a signed and sealed compact to join arms with Servia whenever she should be attacked by Bulgaria, violating her plighted word and secretly giving aid to the Teutons — by submarine bases, for example — all on account of a royal marriage. The Greek Constitution has been trampled under foot by this medieval monarch and the hands of the clock have been turned back 200 years. In the midst of modern democracy the specter of the Divine Right of Kings again raises its head.

We have beheld the assassination and extermination — I am using the terms almost with literal exactness — of the oldest Christian people. History, I believe, affords no parallel in fiendish inhumanity and calculated cruelty to the Armenian massacres. The American savages, glutted with blood and intoxicated with the fever of battle, were not more inhuman than the studied and deliberate policy of the Turks. This policy could have been controlled and checked by the Prussian autocracy by a nod of the head or a wave of the hand. No historical fact is more clearly established than this.

We have beheld an attempt — futile, but none the less criminal and sacrilegious, — to stir up a religious war, an attempt to array the forces of Mohammedanism against those of Christianity. It is an affront to the memory of every Christian soldier who died in the wars of the Crusades, or who fell at the battle of Tours when Charles Martel rolled back from Europe the tide of Islam.

We have beheld the brazen adoption of the policy of Frightfulness — the waging of war so cruelly and remorselessly by the bombardment of summer resorts, the dropping of bombs upon the women and children of unfortified towns, the torpedoing of passenger boats, and the application of the iron heel to invaded territory as to endeavor to strike terror to the heart of neutrals

and to the civil population of belligerents. Nowhere has the subtle psychology of this policy been more potent than in America. While it has inflamed a certain element with a holy wrath, it has furnished a text for the pacifist to dilate upon the horrors of war and extol the virtues of non-resistance. Indeed the unconscious alliance of pacifist with Teuton has been one of the outstanding ironies of this world tragedy.

Such have been those offenses against the higher morality which, in their relation to the United States, it is difficult to subsume under the canons of international law. And through it all we have been "neutral!" Americans have prated grandiosely about "humanity" and adjured the "liberals" of all lands to take heart! The President has asked us to be neutral "even in thought!" I am loyal to my President; he has been elected by a majority of my countrymen; my service is his and my acts must be his. But my conscience is my own! He cannot become the custodian of my convictions. It is no time for an inconspicuous private citizen to add his pennyweight of criticism to the burden of our ruler, but when he says in an address before the League to Enforce Peace, "With the causes and objects of the war we are not concerned. The obscure fountains from which its stupendous flood has burst forth we are not interested to search for or explore." I reserve the right to indulge in a private moral revolt. Those were burning words that Agnes Repplier recently uttered in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In commenting upon this statement, she says: "The greatest, or at least the most far-reaching, moral issue which has arisen in nineteen hundred years is offered to the judgment of the world, and we are bidden to ignore it. The rights and wrongs of uncounted millions are at stake, agonies unutterable have dimmed the light of heaven, the whole fabric of civilization rocks in the blast, and our President assures us we are not even interested in knowing where the guilt lies, that it is not our province to sever truth from falsehood! For the first time in our lives we have been offered release from the responsibilities inseparable to man's estate."

The problem for the Sons of the American Revolution to ponder is whether this country has reached such an exalted moral plane that its policy of inaction is a sublime exhibition of Christian forbearance; or whether its supine submission to the tide of events is evidence of a decline of the national spirit and an emasculation of the national character. If the latter should turn out to be true, it is worth while for us to endeavor to ascertain its causes.

In my opinion one of its causes is to be found in the moral collapse of our clergy in the face of a great crisis. I have been

amazed and shocked — or possibly encouraged — to find in hard-headed, square-jawed men of affairs and in virile, red-blooded young college graduates a more searching grasp of the moral and political issues at stake in this war than has been generally revealed by our spiritual advisers. Occasionally there has rung out from our pulpits the voice of a prophet, but in general there has been a tendency to dwell lingeringly upon the horrors of war and glorify peace into a beatitude, to the exclusion of truth, justice, righteousness and honor. The inexorable laws of struggle and sacrifice which are fundamental in the development of personal or national character have been glided over meagerly. Our clergy have talked about a "league of the nations," the "community" of the races, and the glories of internationalism and world citizenship; but what is a community? It is a common sharing of common responsibility. If I sit upon my porch while a bully beats and robs an inoffensive little boy, or a brute violates the honor of a woman, and callously look on and do nothing because I am a man of peace and it is none of my business, what kind of a citizen of my boasted community am I? Neutral, I suppose! And I can expiate it all the next day by taking up a collection to send some fruit and flowers to the wronged family or by preaching a sermon, full of beautiful generalizations about love and humanity.

Our Protestant pastors are given to lamenting the fact that they are unable to reach the young men of the land. They complain of the disproportion of women in their congregations and in the activities of their church organizations. When we have a religion preached to us that is vibrant with a call to present duty, instead of nebulous in its promise of security from attack, our young men will respond with the thrill of eager youth. How, for example, can a pastor expect to appeal to a young lawyer, schooled in the processes of logic, when he exalts peace into a moral quality? His hearer knows that, if he were to prepare a brief in which his reasoning limped so palpably, it is doubtful if the Court would do it the honor of reading it through. Peace is not a moral quality. It is a mere state or condition. True, it is a condition very much to be desired, just as prosperity and good homes and warm clothing are to be desired. But if these things are purchased at the price of dishonor, they become a badge of shame. Justice is a moral quality, so is truth, so is honor, and righteousness is the sum of all the moral qualities. It is true that Christ preached peace, but He did not preach peace at any price. If He had, there would have been no Gethsemane and no Calvary.

I wish the cartoon of the Dutch artist, Raemaeker, could be framed and placed on the study table of every pacifist pastor in this country — the figure of the body of a maiden clinging to a

cross with a dagger through her heart. Beside her stand three sensual male figures. One of them points his finger at her and sneeringly asks: "And why did she not yield: they would have paid, to be sure?" The maiden is labelled "Belgia." Yes, Belgium could have had "peace" and the price beside — for permitting the Central Powers to march across her territory and stab France in the back. But she went on the altar for such a bauble as honor! Alongside it, it might be well to place that other cartoon — was it another of Raemaeker's, or was it from Punch? — in which Kaiser Wilhelm stands pointing to a devastated Belgium and asks of its indomitable young monarch "What have you left, Albert?" "My soul!" is the reply.

Another cause of the failure of the nation to measure up to the moral responsibilities of the hour is found in the occupation of this country by numerous partially assimilated racial groups. When the Democratic Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate and the Republican Leader of the lower House, each representing large German constituencies, advocate the contemptible policy of warning American citizens of ships where they have a legal right to be, for fear this nation may be called upon to defend them, the condition of our American Congress is indeed reduced to a low estate. With brothers, sons, or other relatives fighting in the German Army, or lying in unmarked graves in front of Verdun or the Somme, it is quite understandable that men of German blood should turn yearningly to the cause of the Fatherland, but what shall we say of public men who forget their oath of office and the honor of their country at such an hour? We have also in this country an unknown percentage of citizens of Irish blood who nurse so keenly the past wrongs of their people at the hands of England that they are blinded to the principles of human liberty at stake in this contest. Just how considerable is this percentage, I am unable to say. Most of the Irish-Americans with whom I converse condemn the acts and policy of the Central Powers. We have also a considerable number of Swedish-Americans who, on account of their inherited enmity to Russia, seem to have been likewise blinded. I also believe that a certain percentage of our Russian Jews have allowed their sense of the wrongs of their kindred at the hands of Russia to dull their vision of the issues of right and wrong involved in this contest. In other words, the American spirit has failed to respond because of the lack of homogeneity in the American people.

Still another cause may be found in the geographical remoteness of large sections of this country from the theater of action. It has been difficult to interest people of the Middle West and the Mountain States in questions of national honor involved in the rights of the sea. These people are intensely loyal and would respond to a man, if the call to arms were sounded; but it is

perhaps not unnatural that we should find greater indifference there than upon the Atlantic seaboard. There is also a larger German-American element in the West than here.

The chief cause, however, is to be found in a philosophy insidiously taking root in the minds of the people that the State is an institution to be filched from and leaned upon, but not to be served. Every street corner orator declaims raucously about his rights, but never a word about his duties. Until we learn in the fire of bitter experience that rights and duties are correlative terms, we can look for no revival of the national spirit. So long as able-bodied young men are left to lounge about city streets and country grocery stores, while other young men volunteer to go to the front and fight their battles for them, democracy is a mere sounding phrase. Until we recognize that the state protects our property, safeguards our lives, gives us our education and renders possible the performance of individual and family functions under the rule of law and order; that the condition of orderly liberty is the fruit of long ages of struggle in which uncounted and unnamed millions have borne their part; and that he who would participate in these benefits without contributing to them is a parasite and a robber, we can have no real sense of personal loyalty to the nation. Instead of gratitude for the blessings of liberty and order, we often encounter resentment against their necessary restraints. Only the shock of disaster, or the immediate and thoroughgoing establishment of a system of universal and compulsory military service can renew the declining national character. This would symbolize patriotism in action, not mere lip-loyalty. If we are to rely on volunteer military service, why not introduce voluntary tax-paying? Let that in turn be followed by voluntary observance of law. Abrogate government, relax discipline, and let every duty, public and private, be subject to voluntary observance. Then, indeed, will our dreamers have their "rights" and we shall enter upon a Fool's Paradise.

Can we not copy the virtues of other nations without appropriating their vices? Switzerland, more democratic than America, has done it. Let us take our boys in the schools, begin young with them, train them to physical vigor and powers of endurance, teach them to stand erect and give and obey orders, instill into them love of country and concrete patriotism, and at the age of eighteen or nineteen turn them over to the federal government to be moulded and made fit by a period of military service, and we will have a generation of better workmen, better lawyers, better doctors, better ministers, better husbands and fathers, and infinitely better citizens. Do likewise with our girls; make them, also, fit and strong; educate them in all that is truest and best! Let their education, if possible, be so much better than

that of boys as the functions they are to perform are more sacred and important. Before all, teach them in the fear of God that there has been confided to them the holy office of replenishing the earth. When instruction in "birth control" succeeds the sacrament of the family altar, and the whimpering refrain, "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," replaces the martial notes of the "Star-Spangled Banner," the doom of this republic is sealed!

In addition to, and sensitively expressive of, the foregoing causes of national apathy, there is, I believe, another that I may not at this time discuss, but which history will weigh justly and judge unsparingly. Be the causes what they may,—be they racial, religious, geographical, philosophical or political, — that nation which is the home of freedom and birthplace of democracy has looked on with callous indifference at an hour when these institutions throughout the world have been hanging in the balance; it has chosen the pathway of sloth and ease instead of hard duty; it has preferred to grow rich and fat in material things at the expense of poverty of spirit and leanness of the soul. In the brief space of a decade and a half we have changed from a nation that the world applauded for taking up the White Man's Burden, for freeing Cuba, regenerating the Philippine archipelago, maintaining the open door in China and assuming the obligations and honors of a World Power, to a nation of apologists, word-worshippers, phrase-mongers and murmurers of porch philosophies. If this current be not stayed, inside of the next half-dozen generations some more virile people will conquer the soil that your forefathers wrested from the tyranny of a British king, and those who now occupy it will become parasites and vassals. I do not expect this to happen. I have faith in the mighty latent forces not as yet called upon and which are chafing under restraint; but in addressing this society of iron traditions, one must not mince words or gloss over realities. While pleading for national manhood, one must not play the moral coward in the process.

We end where we began — What would Washington have us do? Washington the unselfish, the tenacious, the wise in counsel, the decisive in action; Washington the man of practical vision and universal conscience, who saw in the wrongs of Massachusetts the cause of liberty in Virginia, and who recognized in a paltry tax on tea levied in a far-off colony an invasion of the immemorial rights of Englishmen everywhere; who scorned evasions and excuses and dared to pit a disorganized group of unready and widely-scattered colonies against one of the first powers of Europe; who asked not, "Can we win?" but only, "Are we right!"



You await my answer? — if it has not already been answered it were futile to measure words. Your forefathers answered it in 1776. They answered it when they stood at Bunker Hill, charged at Saratoga, endured at Valley Forge and triumphed at Yorktown. They answered it when, at the end of the war, bare-footed and in little straggling groups, with no sound of martial music or acclaim of welcoming throngs to greet them, they found their way back from distant battlefields to their neglected farms and impoverished families, — a race of heroes! And because that question, asked as it was by the searching logic of events, was answered by them in the way it was, you and I and every alien who has since come to our shores and received the boon of our citizenship have today a nation to live in and traditions to defend.

The nations of Europe are not on trial today. They have met their Gethsemane and overcome it. France, our traditional friend, gallant, chivalrous, heroic France — she is not on trial! England, our traditional enemy, yet the Motherland, the home of our institutions and our literature — dogged, steadfast, unshakable and calmly brave — she is not on trial. Neither is Russia, awakened out of her slumber to a new life, on trial. Nor, God forbid, is Belgium on trial, — martyred Belgium, the hero of the nations, a people who were tempted but whose honor was not for sale. She surely has met the test and judgment has been passed. Nor, gentlemen, are the German people on trial! For the world has never witnessed a steadfastness, solidarity, loyalty, efficiency, and sacrifice greater than this wonderful people has exemplified; and after they awake from this horrible nightmare and their historians have placed the blame of their calamity where it belongs, — as we hope — upon a deposed and departed dynasty, her people in the light of a new liberty will read poems and sing songs reciting the mighty deeds of valor of her Great Army. They fought for the right as they saw the right; more than this no man can bestow or people vouchsafe. The one nation of all the world whose moral qualities are being weighed in the balance in this mighty crisis is our giant young Republic of the West. History will judge us; our sons will judge us; the world is judging us. God strengthen Columbia's arm and refurnish her heart!

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